



URBAN PROJECTS

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LE ZOOM

Program for a label

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Le Zoom is a label for ideas and objects. We have borrowed the concept of a label from the music business where labels allow individual artists to publish work that is created in ever changing formations. A label allows us to set up new structures of collaboration for each project and to involve people from other disciplines whenever we feel the need for that.

Le Zoom investigates the role of architects in the age of communication. More than ever, clients – developers, city representatives, cultural institutions – depend on architects because of their ability to produce images. Images that show how cool the future will be, how nice the buildings will look, how happy the people will feel. Images to convince voters, investors, politicians, that the project in question deserves their support.

Architects today are neither master builders nor the aggressive, avant-gardist visionaries of the Machine Age. We are communicators, just like graphic designers, art directors or science-fiction writers. The tools we use are texts, graphics, photoshop montages, 3d renderings, animations. That's fine with us. We prefer to explore this new field of work upon fighting a battle of retreat within the traditional borders of the architectural profession.

What we feel less comfortable with is a lack of transgression and commitment that seems to go with this development. Young architects are supposed to be fast, fresh and funny. The heavy and critical intellectual attitude of the eighties has become utterly unfashionable. Does that mean that we have to quit worrying, quit thinking altogether? With his work for Benetton, Toscani managed to reveal and challenge the imperative of the seductive image in advertisement. Is it possible to make a similar move in the world of architectural imagery? Could there be a contemporary sequel to the investigations carried out by the radical hippies of Superstudio, Haus-Rucker&Co. or Archizoom in the late sixties and early seventies?

Le Zoom is European. At the moment people from the Netherlands, France and Switzerland are involved in the label. We are based in the Netherlands, in an environment where architecture is stimulated by the government in an unparalleled way. Without doubt, it is a nice place to be for young architects. We get money and airplay like nowhere else - as this publication proves. On the other hand, this omnipresence of good intentions scares us. The one-way road that leads from winning a price in the European competitions via exhibitions like this one to the first design commission within the governmental VINEX - housing program has been too nicely laid out for us. We could get our little share of fame without ever questioning our own position, without ever investigating the cultural background of our work. In the introduction to this series of exhibitions, Ruud Brouwers claims that "society cannot allow itself to make no use of this [our] latent potential". We are flattered... but what exactly is "society" expecting from us? And do we want to play along?

For the two exhibitions we have organized within the framework of "Groepsportretten 2000", we had been invited to present, next to our own work, two projects dealing with local questions. Both local assignments had to do with the tension between a preserved, historical context and the current wave of modernization in the Netherlands. We decided to resist the temptation to produce two fast, fresh and funny projects. Instead, we started studying the way the two cities represent themselves and the role of history in their urban marketing. Our exhibitions attempt to expose the cultural background of the two assignments, to lay bare the hidden agendas of the urban plans on which the projects were to be based. Perhaps, as Hal Foster suggests in "The Return of the Real", the role of a new critical architecture is not to break with the order but to expose it in crisis, to register its points not only of breakdown but of breakthrough: the new possibilities that such a crisis might open up.